

in Syria. According to the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, "The regime continued to frame opposition actions as targeting the Christian population. At the same time, it increased its own targeting of Christian and Alawi anti-regime activists in order to eliminate minority-voices that might counter its narrative of 'Sunni-Sponsored violence'."

Religious minorities seem to fear the opposition forces. Some prominent opposition groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) have a religious basis which has been seen as threatening to Syria's Alawite and Christian minorities.

Smaller opposition factions, such as the al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist al-Nusra Front, take explicitly sectarian positions. There are reports of incidents in which rebel forces engaged in sectarian violence, such as burning Shi'ite mosques.

Christians are perceived by many in the opposition to be Assad loyalists, possibly due to Assad's aggressive recruitment of Christians into the regime militias at the start of the civil war. Other reports indicate that the Christians attempted to remain neutral either out of pacifism or concern about their rights under opposition forces.

Christian neutrality was perceived by some opposition groups as loyalty to the regime. In December 2012, a rebel force believed to be associated with the Muslim Brotherhood released a Youtube video entitled, "Warning mainly Christian cities in the province of Hama", and promising attacks if they continue to support and house the pro-Assad forces.

Christian leaders have been targeted, such as the April 2013 kidnapping of Mor Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Orthodox Church and Bishop Boulos Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Church—both men still have not been returned.

The Druze community reports being targeted as well. In March 2013, a Druze leader reported to Christian Solidarity International, "Our people get stopped at checkpoints and are asked which sect they belong to. Once the militias hear that they are from Swaida [a province where 90% of the population is Druze], our men disappear."

The al-Nusra Front, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization, has been blamed for much of the sectarian rhetoric and violence, but dozens of the opposition groups ascribe to Islamist or Salafist-jihadist ideologies and mingle with the Free Syrian Army—which the U.S. may now be supporting.

Over the last three years, the United States has committed to providing \$250 million to various opposition groups in Syria—at least \$117 million of which has already been funded, largely to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. With the chemical weapon red line crossed, the Administration has also agreed to provide ammunition and small arms.

It is not clear whether any of this new lethal assistance will go to the Free Syrian Army and its worrisome opposition groups.

The Administration has also committed to send an additional \$300 million in humanitarian aid to "vulnerable groups" in and surrounding Syria. It is not clear whether distribution of this aid will be informed by the plight of religious minorities.

I am very concerned that the Administration may not be taking seriously the targeting of re-

ligious minorities. Too often, we have heard from this Administration that they have bigger issues to deal with than the vulnerability of religious minorities.

In the last two appropriations cycles, we have directed the Administration to condition aid to Egypt (\$1.3 billion dollars) on certification that Egypt is acting to protect the religious freedom of its minorities. The Administration (both Secretaries Clinton and Kerry) refused to do so. Perhaps not surprisingly, the government of Egypt continues to allow attacks on Coptic Christians with impunity.

Money talks. The United States should be using assistance to ensure recipient countries and entities have a plan that is implemented to protect vulnerable religious minorities. This is all the more critical in situations like Syria, where we are providing lethal aid in what has become sectarian tinderbox.

RECOGNIZING DR. MITCHELL T. MUNSON

HON. MIKE COFFMAN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Mr. COFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a constituent of mine, Dr. Mitchell T. Munson, of Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Dr. Munson will soon be elected president of the American Optometric Association (AOA) during their 116th annual meeting, where he will be installed as the association's 91st president on Saturday, June 29, 2013, in San Diego, California.

Dr. Munson is a graduate of the Southern California College of Optometry and has a private practice in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. He has been a leader in his profession at the local, state, and national levels. The Colorado Optometric Association (COA) named him Young Optometrist of the Year in 1993 and he became president of the COA in 1995. Dr. Munson is a past president of the Southwest Council of Optometry and a Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry.

Dr. Munson has built a renowned record of service and leadership in his profession and I am confident that he will have a very successful term as president of the AOA. The sixth District of Colorado is proud to have Dr. Munson as a constituent and I join his family, friends, and colleagues in congratulating him on this achievement and wishing him the very best of luck.

ETHIOPIA AFTER MELES: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, last week, the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, which I chair, held a hearing that examined the human rights and governance situation in Ethiopia, and the status of U.S. relations with Ethiopia. Given Ethiopia's important cooperation in opposing Is-

lamic militants in Somalia, as well as its cooperation in other counter-terrorism and peacekeeping efforts, the administration has been reluctant to seriously hold the Ethiopian government to account for persistent, egregious human rights violations, including the inability of the opposition political parties to function, restrictions on civil society organizations and journalists that prevent them from operating freely and forced removals of citizens from their lands.

According to the USAID's Assistant Administrator for Africa Earl Gast, "USAID believes that open channels of communication with the Ethiopian government create opportunities to influence democracy, rights, and governance issues." However, Amnesty International testified last week that "[s]ince 2005 the human rights situation in the country has deteriorated still further, with significantly increased restrictions placed on freedom of expression, association and other rights. Sadly the Ethiopian authorities have not acted in a vacuum during this period. The United States and others in the international community have failed to raise concerns over the government's systematic violation of human rights and flouting of its international obligations. The failure to speak out and press for change has emboldened the government and also allowed Ethiopia to set a dangerous example for other governments in the region to emulate. It is critical that the United States and other members of the international community press the Ethiopian authorities to address human rights concerns and repeal and reform key legislation and policies."

Amnesty International also noted in its testimony today that "[f]or Ethiopians held in detention, conditions continue to be extremely harsh. Torture is regularly reported to take place during interrogation in the initial stages of detention, often before the detainees have access to their families or to legal representatives. Prisoners have been slapped, suspended from the walls and ceiling by their wrists, beaten with various objects, denied sleep, electrocuted, and had weights suspended from their genitalia. Solitary confinement for extended periods is often reported. Within prison facilities, sanitation was often reported to be poor. Amnesty International has received reports of medical resources being withheld, and reports of deaths in custody. Food and water is often in short supply, and is supplemented by visiting family members where access is permitted."

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous country, after Nigeria, and the United States considers its government to be an important development and regional security partner. Ethiopia plays a key leadership role in the region, hosts the African Union (AU) headquarters, and is a major troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations.

According to the State Department, the three pillars of the bilateral relationship with Ethiopia are economic growth and development; democracy, governance, and human rights; and regional peace and security. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Karen Hanrahan stated in an October 2012 speech that "advancing democracy and human rights is one of our highest priorities in our engagement with Ethiopia." Nevertheless, it has been difficult to get cooperation from the current and previous administrations in confronting the

Government of Ethiopia on its shortcomings in observing democratic principles and human rights in that country.

In June 2005, following a contentious election in which then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his party seemed to suffer unexpected losses in the legislature, demonstrators, led by college students, took to the streets to protest a delayed release of election results. The government's reaction was to deploy snipers who shot and killed protesters and to jail hundreds of others. An increasingly violent response to protests took place in November of that year. The death toll resulting from both protests was 193, but the numbers arrested has never been confirmed.

In the summer of 2005, I travelled to Ethiopia to assess the situation and met with Prime Minister Meles, members of his government, political opposition leaders, including one of our witnesses today—Berhanu Nega—civil society representatives, the religious community and the diplomatic community. What I found was a government leader who was arrogant in his certainty that he could arrest his political opposition whenever he wanted. I also found a political opposition convinced that they had won a majority in the legislative elections that year.

Unfortunately, the government's view won the day. Mr. Nega and other political leaders and human rights officials were arrested and held in jail for more than a year on charges that had to continually be changed due to the repeated failure to convict them. Some of them who managed to be released from jail, found themselves forced to live outside their home country, such as Mr. Nega.

The political space for opposition parties continues to be constricted. The imprisonment and prosecution of political leaders has dissolved parties and caused reformulations that also weren't able to continue. Mr. Nega founded Ginbot 7, a new political party in Ethiopia, but two years ago, it was declared a terrorist organization by the Meles government, and not only was it unable to operate openly, but Ethiopian journalists were prevented from reporting on the party or its statements.

Similarly, the Government of Ethiopia, according to the State Department's human rights report, continued to imprison more than 400 opposition leaders, activists, and local journalists by the end of 2012, many on vague national security-related charges.

As of 2011, the Ethiopian government had completed long-term cheap land leases on more than 3.6 million hectares (equivalent to the size of the Netherlands), mainly to large-scale foreign agricultural investors, and an additional 2.1 million hectares of land has since been made available for such leases to foreigners. An estimated 1.5 million Ethiopians in four regions have been displaced, many of them subject to a supposedly voluntary program known as "villagization." Others displaced due to these land leases or because of major dam projects now reside in refugee camps in Kenya.

Despite an unacceptable political and human rights environment in Ethiopia, we hold out hope that the post-Meles government may yet change the direction the government has taken for so long. Earlier this month, thousands of Ethiopians protested political repression in the capital city of Addis Ababa. Under the late Prime Minister Meles, such a show of defiance likely would have been met with offi-

cial violence and mass arrests, but the government of current Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn did not react in that way. This is an encouraging sign that the current Ethiopian government may consider changing its course and allowing its citizens to effectively express themselves—including at the ballot box.

Our witnesses last week included the former U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia, the U.S. official in charge of our significant aid portfolio to Ethiopia, the former elected mayor of Addis Ababa, a member of the first U.S. delegation to meet with the current government and a longtime Ethiopian activist on human rights issues.

RECOGNIZING CLARINETIST
ARIANNA BEYER, WINNER OF
THE 2013 UNITED STATES NAVY
BAND HIGH SCHOOL CONCERTO
COMPETITION

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Mr. WEBSTER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to congratulate clarinetist Arianna Beyer on competing in and winning the 2013 United States Navy Band High School Concerto Competition. This annual competition identifies the best high school musical talent in the nation and allows the finalists to travel to Washington, D.C. to compete for a chance to perform a prepared solo piece with the world-renowned United States Navy Band.

For 12 years now, the United States Navy Band has hosted this national competition. After each student submits an audio recording, the United States Navy Band evaluates each submission and selects the finalists to come to Washington, D.C. to perform at the competition. This competition is not only used as a method of motivating and rewarding inspiring musicians, but also to stimulate America's future leaders. In order to win this competition, Ms. Beyer sacrificed a vast amount of her time and dedicated herself to this goal. Her relentless pursuit of maximizing her potential has allowed her to gain tremendous recognition as a clarinetist at a young age. Ms. Beyer continues to go above and beyond all expectations in her musical endeavors.

Her accomplishments do not end with winning the United States Navy Band High School Concerto Competition. She has excelled in the classroom and as a leader in her community. Arianna continues to give back by mentoring peers in both music and academic curriculums. In addition, Arianna is a 2013 Emerson Scholar and has received a full merit scholarship to attend Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan this upcoming summer. In the fall of 2013, she will begin her dual degree studies at the Eastman School of Music and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rochester.

On behalf of the citizens of Central Florida, I am pleased to recognize and applaud Arianna for her hard work, dedication and achievement. She is most deserving of this prestigious honor as the winner of the 2013 United States Navy Band High School Concerto Competition. May her character and passion inspire others to follow in her footsteps. I wish her great success as she applies her dedication toward even higher pursuits.

RECOGNIZING THE VOLUNTEERS
FOR PROJECT MEND-A-HOUSE

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the volunteers for Project Mend-A-House.

A joint effort between private citizens and the Prince William County government, Project Mend-A-House was created in 1984. At the time, Lily Blackwell was a volunteer delivering meals to seniors who were confined to their homes due to disabilities. Her call to action began with the observation that a number of seniors along her delivery route could no longer perform necessary home repairs. Basic home repair and some structural improvements were needed to ensure that these disabled seniors remained safe and independent. Ms. Blackwell partnered with Toni Clemons-Porter and Lin Wagener of the Prince William Area Agency on Aging to create the foundation of an organization that has now provided humanitarian assistance for a quarter of a century.

Project Mend-A-House completes home repairs and safety modifications to facilitate independent living for seniors, the disabled and low-income residents. Over the years, projects have ranged from fixing termite damage in an older home to making entire houses more accessible with wheelchair ramps, hand rails, shower seats and transfer benches. The work is truly a community effort. Local corporate partners provide monetary support, volunteers and building materials. Civic associations and faith based groups contribute hundreds of volunteer hours to Project Mend-A-House each year. Project Mend-A-House puts everyone to work regardless of skill level to improve the quality of life for our disabled, elderly and low income neighbors.

It is my honor to enter into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the names of the volunteers for Project Mend-A-House:

Lee Bertand, Edie Clark, Don McCubbin, Steven Donovan, Rich Feickert, Kristen Hull, Tajr Hull, Dave Kaiser, Bob Leiker, Terry Lopez, Chris Maddocks, Sally Okuly, Marty Raines, Barbara Reese, David Seigrist, Dave Rogers, Matt Schaffer, Gail Straker, Guy Straker, Therese Swetnam, Terry Swirchak, Sarah Tamai.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in commending the volunteers of Project Mend-A-House for their service and in thanking them for their dedication to our community.

CELEBRATING THE 2013 STANLEY
CUP CHAMPION BLACKHAWKS

HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Chicago Blackhawks on winning the 2013 Stanley Cup. As the team lifted the historic Stanley Cup in the air, it was as if they were lifting the City of Chicago itself.

From beginning to end, the Blackhawks were the best team in the National Hockey